

PROTEST

(233)

OF THE BELGIAN GOVERNMENT AGAINST THE CONTENTION OF GERMANY RELATING TO BREAKING OF HER NEUTRALITY.

CONSULAT GENERAL DE BELGIQUE AU CANADA,

OTTAWA, March 25, 1915.

The Right Honourable Sir ROBERT L. BORDEN,
Prime Minister of Canada,
Ottawa.

SIR,—I am directed by His Excellency the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Belgium to lay before the Canadian Government the following protest of my Sovereign's Government against the contention on the part of the German Chancery that as far back as in 1906 Belgium has broken her own neutrality by the conclusion of an agreement with Great Britain.

On the 2nd of December, the Chancellor of the German Empire made the following declaration in the Reichstag:—

“On the 4th of August, we had already indications of the offence committed by the Belgian Government. I was not then yet in possession of formal proofs in writing. But such proofs were well known to the British Government. And now that, through the documents found in Brussels and published by myself, it has been established how and to what extent Belgium had abandoned its neutrality in favour of England, the whole will acknowledge that when our troops invaded Belgium, during the night of the 3rd to 4th August, they were in a country which had since a long time abandoned its neutrality.”

Belgium, justly proud of its traditions of correctness and honour, will certainly not let pass, without inflicting on it a well deserved stigma of shame, the campaign directed against its honour by a Chancery which verily seems to have made of falsehood a real institution. Whatever may be the sufferings endured at the present time by the Belgian people, we still consider that honesty has the same infinite and immutable value.

Belgium has never allowed its patrimony of national uprightness to be impaired. It was the determination to maintain it in all its integrity, and that alone, which dictated the fateful decision taken during the night of August 2, 1914, and impartial history will say so to future generations concerned with moral pride.

A campaign is now being waged with the object of preventing the outside world of perceiving the historical truth. In order to reach that end, nothing is spared. Once more, it is the duty of the Belgian Government to speak, and in so doing, it aims at reaching all countries where right, religion, and honesty prevail.

At the origin of the war, the outrage perpetrated against Belgium was so patent, and the interest of Germany to proclaim it, so as to exercise a certain seduction on its victim, was so evident that the violation of right was shown by the Chancellor of the Empire in the very precincts of the Reichstag. And, at the time, they even went so far as to fascinate the nation by allurements of the mercenary interest which would

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compensate for lost honour. As if honour could be conquered again with money. But necessity has no laws: "Not kennt kein gebot!" The common saying was that everything could be allowed. Was there not the necessity of inflicting an overwhelming blow upon a nation which had to be crushed? Once more the events of the war were to demonstrate that an initial crime fatally carries with it a succession of subsequent crimes.

Belgian soil, whose inviolability had been guaranteed by Germany, had scarcely been invaded; that a part of the invading army was dishonouring itself by a systematic organization, accompanied with an incredible refinement in cruelty, of pillage, arson, rape, and massacre of an inoffensive population.

And during all the time that a barbarity without precedent was thus raging upon unfortunate Belgium, not a word had come from the Belgian Government to justify the invasion. Even the violator himself could not have said the contrary.

Such a state of things was putting in an awkward posture the German Empire, which, in order to vanquish France, was torturing a nation which had never committed any crime. At any price it had become necessary to find an issue to such a moral situation. On the one hand, the martyrdom of innocent Belgium was rousing the indignation of the whole world; on the other hand, people foreign to that terrible war were justly asking themselves the most anguishing questions for the security of their future welfare in the face of a possible threatening triumph of brutality. Four weeks after the declaration of war, the German Chancery discovered in Brussels that certain conversations had been exchanged in 1906 and 1912 between British military attachés and chiefs of the Belgian staff. In order to transform the relation of those conversations into a liberating document, all there was to do was a mutilation of the texts and a telling of falsehoods. That was the only way to give a character of justification to the act accomplished against Belgium.

And thus, in murdering a nation which had been scrupulously neutral, Germany would have unconsciously, it is true, assumed the part of a redresser of wrongs.

There can be no doubt that such a policy was having a new advantage. Its success would have been the means of weighing down under a moral shame the Belgians, who by their loyal and energetic resistance had shattered to atoms the initial plan of the great and powerful German staff. The Belgian people, who had risen in arms to avenge its honour was destined to endure this last torture. It was not sufficient to sacrifice that people; it had also to be dishonoured. And that is why, with an impudence, of which history offers no equal, the German Chancery has affirmed the existence of a convention by which Belgium, being false to its most sacred engagements, would have violated its neutrality to the advantage of England. In order to make a stronger impression upon ignorant people, the German Chancery, with its customary bad faith, had suppressed from the relation of the aforesaid conversations the passage where it was stipulated that the interchange of ideas had only in view the hypothesis when Belgian neutrality would have been violated.

The Belgian Government opposes to the affirmations of the German Chancery the only answer pertinent to them; it is a campaign of falsehood, the more unjustifiable that it emanated from persons pretending to have seen the documents.

Now, what are the documents produced by Germany and alleging felony on the part of Belgium? There are two of them:—

1. A report of conversations which have taken place between Lieutenant-General Ducarne and Colonel Barnardiston in 1906. In the course of those conversations, the British officer has given his views of the manner in which England could come to the help of Belgium, in case of aggression of Germany against Belgium. A certain sentence, in that report, established the hypothesis in which Colonel Barnardiston puts himself. The entrance of British troops into Belgium could take place only in the event of Belgian neutrality being violated by Germany. In translating that report, the *North German Gazette*

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omits that sentence which precisely gives to the document its precise signification. Moreover, the photographic facsimile of the Ducarne report contains the following sentence: "My interlocutor insists on the fact that our conversation was absolutely confidential." The word "conversation" has been transformed by the *North German Gazette* into "convention," and so Colonel Barnardiston is made to say that our "convention" would be absolutely confidential.

Comments would be here useless.

2. A report of a conversation on the same subject took place in April, 1912, between Lieutenant-General Jungbluth and Lieutenant-Colonel Bridges. In the course of that conversation, Lieutenant-General Jungbluth observed to his interlocutor that a British intervention in favour of Belgium, in the case of a German aggression, could only take place with our consent. The military attaché objected that England would perhaps be in the necessity of enforcing its rights and duties as a Great Power guaranteeing Belgium's neutrality without waiting for Belgium's demand of assistance. But that was a personal opinion of Colonel Bridges. The British Government has always concurred in the opinion of the Government of the King that the consent of the latter would be necessary.

The Belgian Government not only declares upon its honour that no convention has ever been concluded, but that, moreover, there have never been on the part of the Government any conferences or propositions with regard to such a convention.

Moreover, the representant of Great Britain, who was the only one qualified to engage that country, has never intervened in those conversations. On the other hand, all the Belgian ministers, without exception, can bear witness to this under oath: No proposition whatever was ever made, either to the Council of Ministers or to any Minister in particular, in order to bring those conversations to any conclusion whatever.

The documents discovered by the Germans bear witness to all that; those documents are perfectly clear, but on the condition that no part of them be mutilated or suppressed.

In face of all these uninterrupted calumnies, the Government which faithfully reflects Belgian uprightness, esteems that its duty makes once more imperative that it should brand the violator of Belgium with the stigma of infamy which to this day is its sole legitimate conquest. The Belgian Government seizes this opportunity to affirm in answer to certain allegations manifestly replete with a malignant intention:—

1. That before the declaration of war, no body of French troops, however insignificant it might be, had ever entered in Belgium. Against such a downright affirmation, no allegation, however honest it might be, can prevail.

2. That not only has it ever declined an offer of troops made by one of the Powers guaranteeing its neutrality, but as soon as war was declared it energetically demanded the military protection of those Powers.

3. That, whilst assuming, as was its duty, the vigorous defence of its fortresses, Belgium has solicited and accepted with gratitude the aids which the guaranteeing Powers have been able to give for the defence of those fortresses.

Belgium, which is a victim of its own uprightness, bows the head to no one. Its honour bids defiance to the assaults of falsehood; it lays faith in the judgment of the universe. In the hour of justice, triumph belongs to those who have sacrificed everything in order to serve, with conscience, the cause of truth, of right, and of honour.

I have the honour to be, sir,

Your most obedient servant,

(Sd.) GODY.

